



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk (860)441-6640  
Town Manager  
(860)441-6630

**Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Heather Sherman Bond, Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter**

**Saturday, December 6, 2008**

**9:00 AM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

#### **SPECIAL MEETING**

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m.*

#### **2. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter  
Members Absent: Councilor Bond and Councilor Schmidt

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent, Director of Administrative Services Doug Ackerman, and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.*

#### **3. NEW BUSINESS**

**2008-0247**

##### **Budget Guidelines for FYE 2010**

##### **Discussed**

*The Town Manager distributed risk assessments on vacant positions, as requested by the Council. He also distributed a packet of miscellaneous information. The first table in the packet, a projected revenue and expense report for FYE 2009, was reviewed in detail by Sal Pandolfo, Director of Finance.*

*Councilor Schmidt arrived at 9:17 a.m.*

**Roll Call:** Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter  
Members Absent: Councilor Bond

##### **Discussed**

*It was noted that in the recent meeting with state legislators, the Council was advised that state revenues to towns appear to be safe for FYE 2009. There have been rumors that towns should anticipate a 10% reduction in Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) funds in 2010.*

*Other items in the information packet included Library and Police Department analyses, and requested statistics from Human Services. The Council discussed the costs associated with police support during community events. Staff was asked to find out if Stonington contributed to the Irish parade. Councilor Streeter suggested asking event organizers to provide 50% of the cost. The Town Manager stated he would provide an analysis of each event to help determine the cost to the Town and contribution percentages.*

*Councilor O'Beirne raised the issue of the Town's contribution to the Groton Long Point and City of Groton Police Departments, and if the Town is funding a higher quality program in those areas than in the Town. The Town Manager suggested that the question is what would it cost to provide Town-like services to the two areas. Studies have been done in the past and the Town could do an in-house analysis of what it would cost to provide Town-level police service to Groton Long Point and the City. Councilor O'Beirne suggested looking at the per officer cost as a simple analysis.*

*Councilor Bond arrived at 9:37 a.m.*

**Roll Call:** Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter

**Discussed**

*The next issue discussed was reduction of hours at the Library. Councilor Monteiro expressed support for closing on Sunday. Councilor Bond suggested closing on Tuesdays and Thursdays since Sundays are the third highest use day of the week. It was noted that Sundays are all part time employees and closing on other days of the week would require renegotiating contracts. The Town Manager noted that the use ranking only looks at the number of materials checked out, not other activities or programs occurring at the Library. Councilor O'Beirne noted that the Library is closed on Sundays for half of the year, so it is not unreasonable to close on Sundays for the rest of the year. The Town Manager noted that our library is open a significantly greater number of hours compared to many other libraries in the region. Doug Ackerman explained that there is some flexibility in the scheduling at the Library and reducing hours will definitely impart the budget. Councilor Bond suggested cutting back Library hours significantly. Councilor O'Beirne suggested asking the Library how they can save \$90,000. Mayor Watson and Councilors Monteiro, Kolnaski, and Schmidt supported Councilor O'Beirne's suggestion. Councilor Sheets concurred with cutting back hours of service significantly. Councilor Brown-Tracy does not favor reducing hours so drastically; but she does support closing on Sunday. Councilor Bond asked for a list of activities at the Library and the number of participants for the past two years.*

*The next area discussed was fleet maintenance for outside agencies. Town Manager Oefinger explained that the Town charges for the actual cost of the service (plus a mark up on parts), and the cost is lower than what agencies would pay commercially. If all outside agency maintenance work stopped, the Town could ultimately eliminate one mechanic position. The Council asked for an analysis of costs versus revenues relative to maintenance of outside agency vehicles.*

*Bond questioned the Town's ability to market fleet maintenance services to area towns and increasing the profit margin. The Town Manager noted the ability to take on other work is limited because there is limited excess capacity with respect to personnel and facilities. Councilor Bond asked staff to look at charging outside agencies more for maintenance, but still enough under the going market rate to make it worth their while.*

*Discussion turned to the list of vacant positions and risk assessments from the various department heads. Discussion followed on filling the Library Director position and any possible ripple effect. Monteiro suggested looking at restructuring not only the Library, but other departments.*

*The Town Manager noted there are no plans to fill the Library Associate or Library Assistant positions at this time. The Office Assistant II position in Parks and Recreation is being analyzed.*

*With respect to police positions, there are a total of three vacancies and the Town Manager feels that all three positions are critical. The vacancies do not include the two patrol officer positions that were approved in the current year budget that will take effect in January. Councilor Monteiro recommended deferring the hiring of the final two officers in the three-year plan to increase the force by six patrol officers.*

*The vacant Planner II position is largely responsible for the Town's community development function. Interviews for the position have been conducted. The Town Manager provided a 5-year history of personnel in Planning and Development Services, and referred Councilors to the budget book for an additional overview. Councilor Bond asked if there are "extra" people in Planning and Development Services since the downturn in the economy and since the Phase I school project is coming to an end. Councilor Sheets expressed support for the position since there are significant funds available for rehab projects. The Town Manager indicated he will get an up-to-date building permit activity report for the department.*

*The Town Manager indicated that the Social Worker II vacancy has just occurred. Councilor Bond asked if there is really a need for a Master's Degree for a Social Worker II, given the list of duties/tasks identified by the Director. The Town Manager stated that he will review this item further and report back to the Council.*

*Doug Ackerman noted that the Telecommunicator I position has been identified as a critical position to provide 24/7 dispatch services.*

*The Assistant Golf Pro position is being analyzed to determine how to fill the position during the times that it is needed and avoid unemployment payments during the winter months. The Golf Pro is very busy with marketing and management and the increase in golf course revenues can be attributed to his efforts.*

*Since the Director has indicated that she could live without this position, the Council felt that the Human Services Assistant position should be eliminated.*

*Councilor Monteiro state she would like to have more meetings and work toward a goal of reducing the budget, until the state revenues are known. The Town Manager explained that he has asked department heads to put together a level service budget with a number of options going as far as a 5% reduction.*

*Councilor O'Beirne left the meeting at 12:01 p.m.*

**Roll Call:** Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter  
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

**Discussed**

*The Town Manager stated that the value of these work sessions is more knowledge, information, and establishing a baseline for the Council to make decisions. He noted that the Council asked for a reduction in the Library budget, but did not address any other departments. The Town Manager asked if the Council would like to meet with department heads, noting that their budget submittals are due to Finance by mid-January.*

*Councilor Monteiro expressed support for meeting with department heads. Mr. Ackerman expressed a concern with talking hypothetical staff reductions. Discussion followed on putting all Town employees on notice that everything is on the table. The Town Manager noted that a 5% reduction will mean staff reductions. Mr. Ackerman's point is that the Council must be careful to focus on services, not people since staff reductions call into play bumping rights and contractual issues. The Council's message was that there is a "general cloud" hanging over everyone. Councilor Bond feels it would be beneficial to make employees aware of the situation and to ask for employee suggestions for consolidation, efficiencies, etc.*

**4. ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to adjourn the meeting at 12:20 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*